

VERBAL JUDO – DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Private security officers, whether working event security or receiving and responding to resident complaints, may be confronted with angry, frustrated, confused and unreasonable people. The signs of their frustrations and anger might be obvious. The indications may include:

- a red or flushed face;
- very loud or soft speech,
- a faster pace or a higher pitch;
- rapid respiration;
- protruding veins;
- hands balled up into fists; or
- an unwillingness to listen.

Sometimes, these behaviors are accompanied by the individuals lack of awareness of his surroundings, clothes in disarray, the odor of alcohol or drugs, or actual threats.

The challenge that security personnel face is to protect themselves from violence and complaints while meeting the individual's needs without resorting to physical means and possibly arrest. Dr. George J. Thompson, author of "Verbal Judo – The Art of Gentle Persuasion," developed a means of teaching law enforcement officers how to communicate effectively with difficult people under stressful situations, and achieving the goal of voluntary compliance. It can be defined as a gentle yet powerful way of persuasion. It serves as an effective alternative to relying on batons and guns to force people to comply. He explains it as the ability to present an "option" to people, convincing them to do something that is in their own best interest. Verbal Judo is used to deal with three (3) basic types of people:

1. Nice people,
2. Difficult people, and
3. People who are difficult but who sound nice.

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Thompson concluded that there are five (5) truths to human interaction:

1. **People feel the need to be respected.** Remember: by virtue of being in a position of authority, you are the “superior” in a superior-subordinate relationship and nobody wants to be seen and treated as a subordinate. Ordering people to do things may work in the short term, and sometimes, there may be no other choice. However, commanding people to do or don’t do something often antagonizes them, resulting in resentment and complaints.
2. **People would rather be asked than to be told what to do.**
3. **People have a desire to know why.** What’s the first thing most people ask when they are pulled over during a traffic stop? Usually, it’s “why did you stop me?” We are an information society, and everyone wants to know what’s going on. People want explanations because they want to understand what’s happening to them and why. They hate feeling powerless.
4. **People prefer to have options over threats.** We’ve already discussed the need to give people explanations and information. Having done so, a person may still not comply. In this event, provide options, with the positive first. For instance, if skateboarders refuse to leave the client’s premises after you’ve explained that they are trespassing, tell them that you will have no other choice but to call local law enforcement who will likely charge them with criminal trespass. If they leave without further complaint, you may say that you will include their act of cooperation in your incident report. Most of the time, citizens will choose what’s in his or her best interest, which is the same behavior you’re seeking.
5. **People want to have a second chance.**